

HB 179
RELATING TO FISH TRAPS

Statement for House Committee on Ocean and Marine Resources
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HB 179 would prohibit the use of fish traps without an escape opening and delegates the rule making responsibility for describing such escape openings to the Department of Land and Natural Resources. This statement does not reflect an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The need to eliminate the current "ghost" fishing of lost traps has been widely recognized among both the local fisherman and those responsible for fisheries management as is appropriately cited in the rationale provided in Section 1 of this bill. This need has become even more critical with the expansion of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands fisheries where shrimp and lobster trapping are major operations. The extreme nature of the fishing grounds around the Hawaiian Islands (heavy wave action, volcanic pinnacles and deep waters) will continue to add to the problem of trap losses.

As presently drafted, however, the entrance opening to a trap could be interpreted as also providing a means of escape since it is physically (if not practically) possible for a fish or crustacean to exit from most of the cone entry type traps presently in use. What is needed is a provision to require major opening of the trap after some period of time. Such an opening could be achieved for example by use of magnesium links on one side of the trap, which disintegrate (dissolve) in sea water after a certain number of hours or days depending on the diameter of the link.

We suggest amending HB 179 to include provision for an escape opening or device which would allow free exit of trapped aquatic life after some period of time and which eliminates any enclosure ability of the trap thereafter.